NEW YORK TIMES
27 February, 1985

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Doubts on Mengele's Time in Paraguay

To the Editor:

On ABC-TV's "This Week With David Brinkley" on Feb. 17, Senator Alfonse M. D'Amato and others stated they had information that the Nazi torturer Dr. Josef Mengele entered Paraguay in 1959, that he acquired citizenship soon afterward and moved freely about. It was further asserted that Paraguayans are still afraid to talk about Mengele because of the country's dictatorship.

On Dec. 1, 1959, I took up duties at the United States Embassy in Paraguay as a political officer, and for four years and two months, through changes in ambassadors and chargés d'affaires, I held that position, often for months at a time as acting chief of the embassy's political section.

Throughout those years, there were constant rumors that Martin Bormann, Hitler's vice führer, was in Paraguay, but never a mention of Mengele. The half-Russian stepdaughter of a West German second secretary assured me that the very bedroom she occupied in her stepfather's house had been used as a bedroom by Bormann. Strangers came to me with tales of Bormann.

The Minister of the Interior, Edgar Insfrán, who controlled security forces, volunteered to me in confidence that he believed Bormann left Europe at the end of World War II on a Vatican passport and was then, in Paraguay. He promised to give me further information. He never did, and I asked him several times about it. He finally replied he had been mistaken.

Despite the dictatorship, Paraguay, whose capital then had only 130,000 inhabitants, did not keep secrets. Almost anybody who had indoor plumbing knew everybody else who did.

It is conceivable that Mengele was there and people thought it was Bormann, but I strongly doubt either was there between Dec. 1, 1959 and Jan. 25, 1964, when I had the responsibility of knowing and reporting to Washington all political matters of interest to the U.S.
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Lock Haven, Pa., Feb. 19, 1985
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